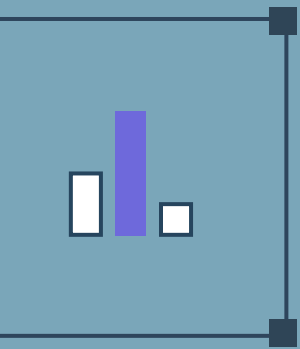
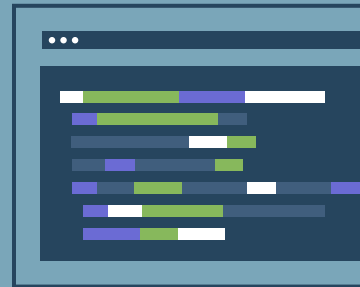




The Remote Teams Playbook for Engineering Leaders

How to build and manage high-performing, future-ready teams



We're living a remote work renaissance.

Forces outside our control have accelerated what was already underway: a massive shift away from commutes and office-bound work and towards a reality in which employees have freedom to do their jobs on their own terms – decoupled from geography and 9-to-5 grinds.

After making swift investments in remote infrastructure and technology, companies are now realizing that fears of productivity loss due to distance are not as they once feared. And employees are finding that the office environment itself isn't what drives their talent or productivity.

Of course, in the engineering world, remote work has long been a foregone conclusion. The **massive imbalance between supply and demand of talented software developers in the U.S.** – an estimated 1M unfilled positions in 2020 according to Code.org – means that thousands of fast-growing technology companies are already building remote teams in countries across the world. By some estimates more than 80% of engineering talent lives outside the United States today, showcasing **that talent is truly global.**

But, this paradigm shift doesn't come without its challenges – in a recent **Terminal survey**, 35% of engineers say it's harder to collaborate and feel part of the team when working remotely, with another 22 percent reporting feelings of loneliness and isolation.

To overcome these, companies need to establish the right workforce strategy, process, and remote-centric culture to build a strong foundation. **This guide is designed to help you build that foundation.**

Whether you need help structuring your remote team (page 6), building remote interviewing practices (page 18), or already have a fully-functioning remote team and are looking for specific tips and tactics (Page 17), we're with you on this journey

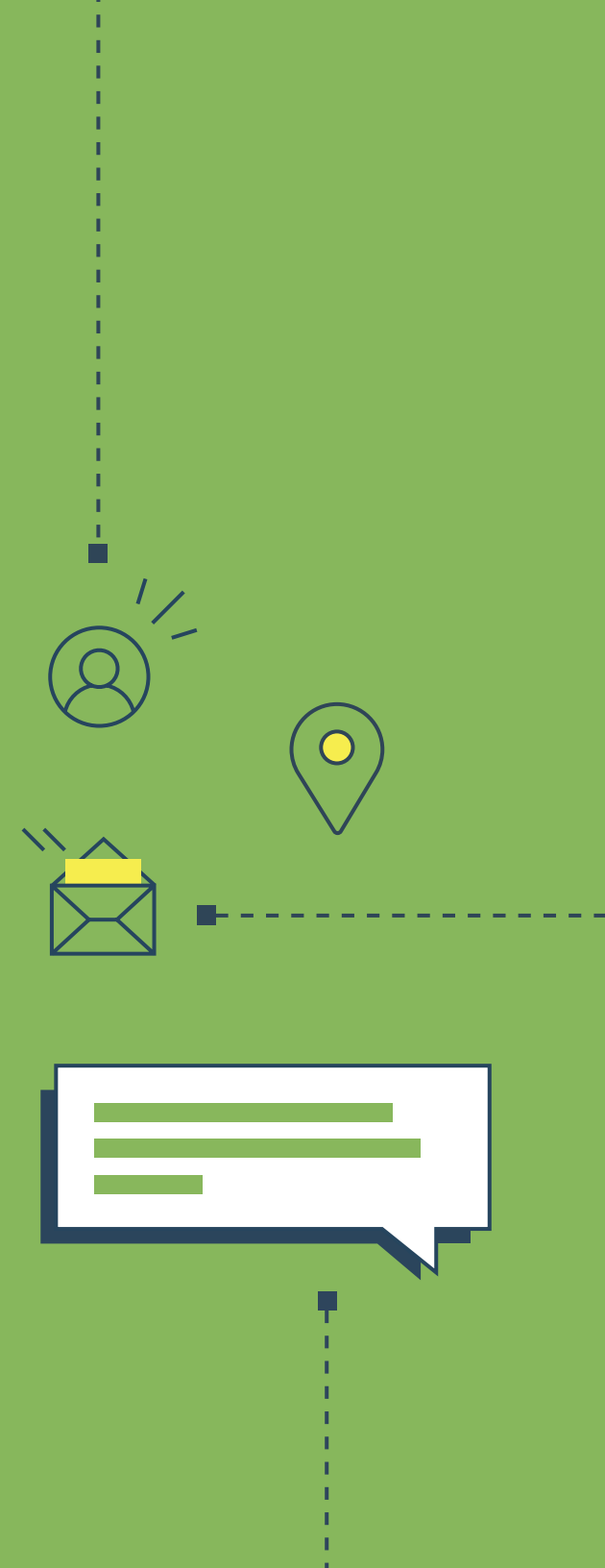
Let's work together to create **thriving remote teams** and build the bridge between the most promising companies and the innovators that drive them – for years to come.



Clay Kellogg, CEO at Terminal

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About Terminal



Terminal is the remote teams engine for fast-growing companies. We hire, house, develop, and retain engineering teams, so you can focus on building brilliant products.

Our journey began in 2016 – Terminal came to life as part of Atomic, a startup studio and venture capital fund that was boldly pursuing an initiative to build five companies at the same time. The companies needed to quickly recruit engineers in order to validate product-market fit.

Terminal hired and launched an initial team of five engineers co-located in Kitchener-Waterloo – opening up a new talent pool for the Atomic businesses. The initial team of five quickly grew into a community of more than 40 engineers, and the five start-ups all received further financing.

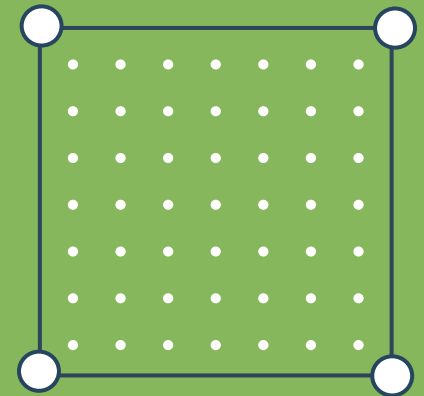
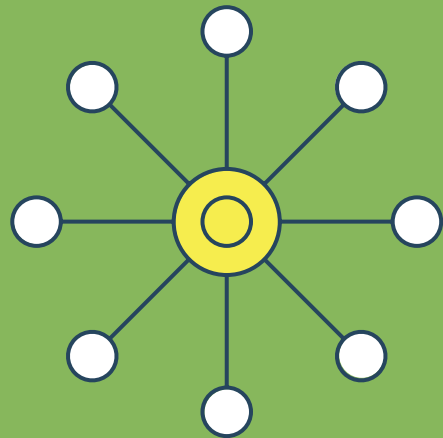
Now, Terminal has campuses in five vibrant tech hubs: Vancouver, Kitchener-Waterloo, Toronto, Montreal and Guadalajara.

We've built 30+ remote teams and hired hundreds of engineers, supported by our unique model that blends recruiting, HR, ops, and community to drive growth.

And, we're just getting started – by empowering brilliant people to partner with bold companies, we want to work with you to solve tomorrow's most challenging problems.

PART ONE:

Structure for success



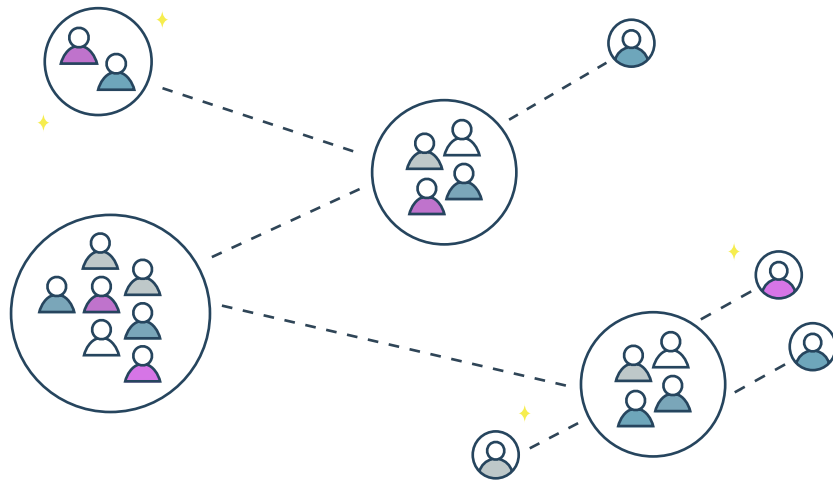
The rise of Hybrid-Remote teams

Companies don't become remote organizations overnight. It's often a long journey from the early days of having everyone together in one place to becoming a fully distributed workforce – with plenty of steps in between.

Usually, businesses dip their toes in slowly with opportunistic remote hires, settling for geographical distance to acquire needed talent. Eventually, when enough remote employees are hired, companies are forced to look intentionally at how to structure this unique workforce.

Enter the Hybrid model – where remote teams and individuals work interconnectedly with those at HQ. The hybrid-style offers the best of both worlds, an ability to maintain a central hub while also bringing on people in new markets to avoid getting bogged down in the local war for talent.

Hybrid model:



The common journey for high-growth business



HQ-centric.

This is where the majority of the company works from one centralized location (or head-quarters). Most businesses start this way.



Remote-friendly.

This is the next stage of evolution for many HQ-centric companies, with opportunistic hiring of individual remote workers.



Hybrid.

This model integrates remote workers and teams into the HQ-Centric design as a way to combat stiff competition for local talent.



Completely Distributed.

These companies don't have an HQ – instead, they're spread out geographically, with everyone working in their own location. While they used to be known as virtual businesses, this type of company has risen in prominence with examples like Automattic and Gitlab finding widescale success.

Pitfalls to look out for (and how to overcome them)

As you travel through the stages of remote, there are most certainly pitfalls along the way. From feelings of isolation to lack of trust and visibility, research shows that the same challenges arise for many remote workers – however, if you’re aware of what’s coming, you can also plan for how to resolve it. Here’s what to look for:



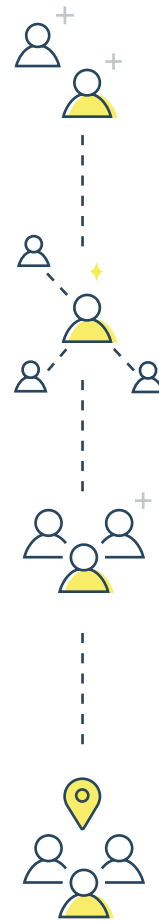
Expert advice: Should anyone *not* go remote?

Early-stage companies may not be suited best for remote teams, recommends Russell Greenspan, CTO at PresenceLearning. “If you’re doing a lot of rapid prototyping or constant whiteboarding, it’s probably not an ideal time to add a remote team. When your direction changes day to day, the delays inherent to remote work can slow momentum.”

COMMON PITFALL	WHY	HOW TO SOLVE FOR IT
Lack of trust	Without daily visibility into employee’s lives, managers worry about productivity, creating a culture of mistrust and fear.	Start with a mindset of trust, combined with documented communications workflows (page 25) and goals (page 23) to ensure visibility and accountability.
Information breakdown	What might have been handled in “drive-by” conversations now requires more intentional communication (or it may not happen at all).	Create strong documentation (page 26), and an asynchronous communication strategy (page 29) to ensure pathways for communication.
Isolation	Physical distance can create emotional distance, too. Isolation is a common complaint among remote workers.	Foster human connection, (page 35) and build strong culture across offices (page 40) to avoid connection loss.
Learning gaps	Educational opportunities are one of the top criteria for engineering job seekers. But often these happen within the walls of HQ, putting remote employees at a deficit.	Companies must build strong L&D programs – and ensure access for remote workers (page 38).

Hiring the right roles for your remote team

“What roles should I hire first?” This is one of the most common questions asked of our recruiting and remote advisory teams. The answer will be different for everyone based on the product you’re building, the talent needed, and your organizational philosophies on remote management. But, here’s one path we’ve seen drive success:



- 1** Start by **augmenting** your existing team, hiring remote engineers as needed to fill current gaps. This allows you to get your feet wet in remote operations. Keep in mind it will add pressure to build intentionality around remote management and ensure there’s clear knowledge-sharing, workflows and collaboration.
- 2** As the team grows, it demands local centralization to stay organized and connected. This is a good time to start looking for an **engineering manager or lead**. Acting as both player and coach, this employee can both contribute and provide guidance. When you hire a lead, that person can create cohesion and connection for your team, but be sure this new layering doesn’t mean remote teams lose face-to-face time with HQ.
- 3** When you have multiple team members in place, consider a **stand-alone ‘squad’ or ‘pod’ structure**. This pod can own a product or initiative end-to-end, with a team of 6-8+ people including frontend, backend, mobile, QA and data science capabilities. As an alternative approach, a squad could be composed of similar skill sets to capitalize on a rich supply pool, such as AI or mobile development. No matter which approach you take, make sure when building a team that can operate independently you intentionally build connection back to team members at HQ.
- 4** Over time, you may want to diversify **across talent markets** to get access to unique talent pools. Terminal customer Armory built a team of DevOps in Guadalajara and then followed the talent to hire support engineers in Toronto and Vancouver that cover more time zones.

Bluescape builds across markets to complement their HQ engineering team

In 2018, Bluescape Software Founder & CTO Demian Entrekin set out to build a remote development team:

“We were looking to build a new product, something that would complement the product we already had, and we wanted to do it outside the bubble of day-to-day development.”

Terminal’s recruiting team quickly brought on a team of five in Vancouver to support Bluescape, which over time morphed into the main mobile development team.

In 2019 they expanded to Kitchener-Waterloo, where new VP of Engineering Rupen Chanda had a strong personal network. Leveraging Terminal’s strong community benefits and premium campuses, Bluescape was able to grow their team at rapid speeds.

One year after launching with us in Kitchener-Waterloo, they have more than 40 developers across three markets, including senior software engineers, engineer managers, principal architects and product managers.

- MARCH 2018**
Launched team in Vancouver
- APRIL 2018**
Closed first engineer hire
- AUGUST 2018**
Scaled to five developers
- MARCH 2019**
Launched team in Kitchener-Waterloo
- MARCH 2020**
Scaled to team of 43 developers across both markets
- APRIL 2020**
Launched team in Toronto

PART TWO:

Selecting the right market



Mapping talent pools to your needs

The success of your remote team may hinge on *where* you build it. A lot of things can drive the decision: Perhaps you have some connections in Toronto you want to leverage, or maybe you've heard there are great front-end engineers in Guadalajara. While these are valid considerations, you'll want to start by *framing your search based on your needs*. Here's a few questions to consider, and what they might mean for your market strategy.



ASK YOURSELF:

LOOK FOR:

What are my growth needs? Just a few developers or do I need scale?	A large talent supply that has continuous feeders (such as prominent universities) that will support your growth now and in the long-term.
Do I value quality or quantity (or a balance of both)?	Average salaries in the market. Cost of living. Rent costs. These will allow you to build out a budget model to estimate the cost of building a team in this market.
Can we support the operational overhead of doing business in a new market?	What does government support look like for tech business – do they have a friendly immigration policy? Do they provide grants for research? Can you afford to create an entity and manage the overhead of this process? Understanding this first can save headaches later.
What “convenience” factors would make my team more successful (such as time zone alignment)?	Time to travel to each market (as it's important to visit your remote team and vice versa). Time zone alignment within 1-2 hours of HQ can make collaboration easier and help you attract the best talent. In Terminal's 2020 report, 88% of engineers say they prefer working in a similar time zone to their peers.
What type of experience do I want my remote developers to have?	An active developer community that can offer professional development, bonding and skills nurturing.

Use a data-focused lens to choose markets

Terminal created a data-backed model that takes into account different criteria in each market, offering a glimpse into potential cities to fit your needs.



The low cost, high supply model

Weighted toward: Low salaries, rent, cost of living, and cost to establish a business

For companies looking to build a large team quickly, with cost-consciousness as a major consideration, this model points you to markets with a large talent pool and low cost of living. While you may sacrifice developer experience in some locations, you'll see decreased costs associated with launching. Just make sure you plan to provide your own training early on to build up talent.

WHERE TO LOOK:

Lisbon
Monterrey
Guadalajara
Buenos Aires
Kuala Lumpur



The convenience and quality model

Weighted toward: Strong developer communities, high-ranking universities with large student populations, government support for tech and low travel time to HQ

For growth-stage companies needing seasoned talent who aren't particularly cost-sensitive, this model places access to talent and ease of establishing business over market cost. It alleviates some of the training needs and can result in faster integrations with the team at HQ.

WHERE TO LOOK:

Toronto
Kitchener-Waterloo
Melbourne
Sydney



The friendly governance model

Weighted toward: cost to establish a new business, average software engineer salary, government grants, tax rates

For large companies concerned with the ease of doing business locally as well as avoiding future roadblocks to growth, this model looks at cities that are supportive to tech – while balancing some cost-conscious measures to expedite growth.

WHERE TO LOOK:

Toronto, Dublin
Kitchener-Waterloo
Ottawa



The sustainable scale model (hybrid evaluation):

Weighted toward: Moderate cost of living and rent, high-ranking universities, rank to establish a business and robust talent pool.

For companies looking for sustainable scale over immediacy, and moderate cost-consciousness, this model focuses on the best of all location attributes, balancing cost, quality, and ease of establishing a business with a substantial talent pool.

WHERE TO LOOK:

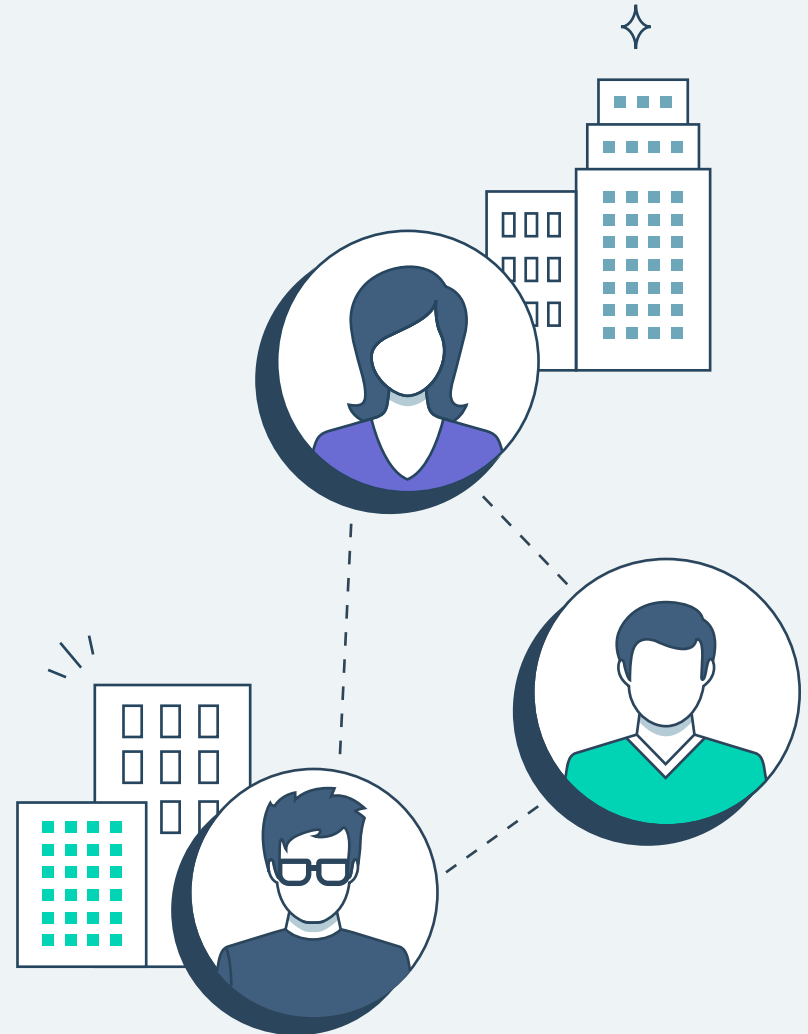
Monterrey
Guadalajara
Bogota
Cluj

Canada-bound: Hims & Hers needed a talented team at scale

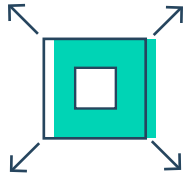
Since opening its digital doors in November of 2017, Hims & Hers has quickly become one of the largest men & women’s health providers in the world. But fulfillment to millions of customers isn’t simple – it requires a healthy mix of systems and people to scale with the demand. In order to meet this need, Hims enlisted Terminal to build a team that could create and own its e-commerce backend.

Because the focus was quickly getting the right person in the right role, Terminal sourced and deployed engineering teams across several of Terminal’s Canadian offices in Kitchener-Waterloo, Montreal, and Vancouver. The span of the offices also increased the geographic and time zone coverage of the Hims technical team, extending the workday and boosting overall productivity.

Within a matter of months, the company had 15 new team members to support its hyper-growth, spread across engineering, analytics, and customer experience.

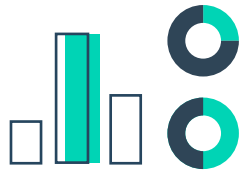


Three quick tips on market selection



There's no one size fits all model or approach

Building consensus internally around your growth priorities is half the battle – after that, the path will likely become much clearer.



The data is constantly changing

Markets are under massive upheaval. Be sure to reassess regularly and avoid making assumptions based on what you did at prior companies.



Spend time in market

The best way to understand the engineering landscape is by going there or by partnering with an established player in the market. Attend a meetup, talk to other engineers, ask questions, and do your own research to understand if it's a culture fit for your company and your team.

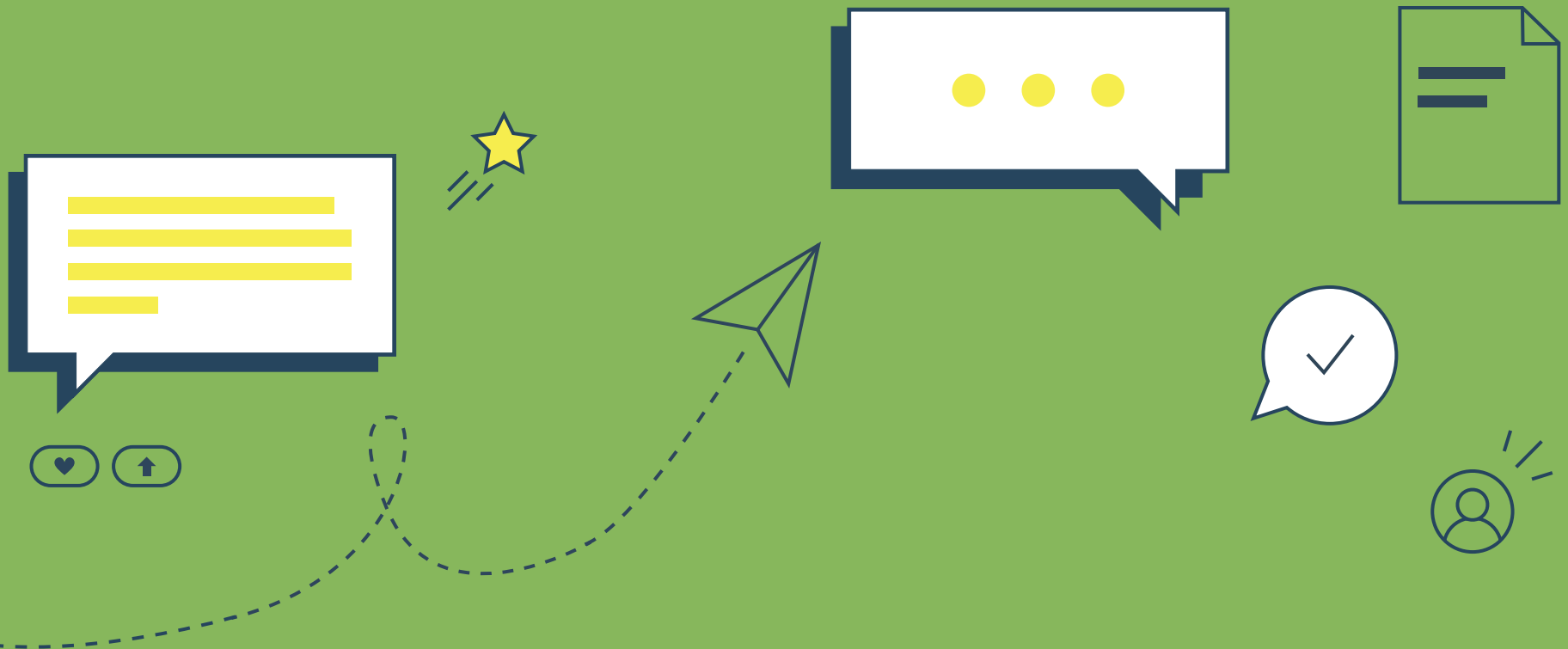


Partner with a talent mapping expert

Don't try to take all the heavy-lifting on by yourself – get support from experts who know the markets and can help you find the best fit.

PART THREE:

10 best practices for managing remote teams



Now, onto what you've been waiting for – we've compiled the top tips, tactics, best practices and real-world examples on remote team management. **Let's dive in.**

- 1** Run the best possible remote interview
- 2** Start things off right with outstanding onboarding
- 3** Set clear goals and expectations (and hold people accountable)
- 4** Nail your workflows for huge boosts in productivity
- 5** Empower your Engineering Managers
- 6** Balance synchronous and asynchronous communication
- 7** Hold remote meetings that bring people together (not set them apart)
- 8** Create connection to overcome loneliness
- 9** Take learning & development across borders
- 10** Create an engineering culture (and embed it across offices)

>one

Run the best possible remote interview

In Terminal's **Engineer 2020 Report**, 9 out of 10 developers surveyed told us they believe the developer interview is fundamentally broken. Frustrations like disorganization, too many rounds of interviews, and long delays are actually turning them off of jobs.

As we enter a new era of recruiting, where employees will either be partially or fully remote, the companies who are able to reinvent their interviewing processes will likely win candidates.



Interview tip: Try a systems design interview

Working through a problem or building something together (also known as pair-programming) is super helpful because it allows you to see how collaborative the candidate can be, how they tackle a problem from different angles and their creative problem-solving.

Here's a few things to consider in making your remote interview as pain-free as possible:

Don't over-index on technical: a barrage of code reviews and exercises can turn people off the process. Of course, continue to run tech interviews and make sure they have the skill sets needed, but also look for ways to analyze how they solve problems, such as a systems design interview where you can work through a problem together.

Ensure your interviewing process isn't one-size-fits all: If you're interviewing for remote engineers, take cultural differences into account. Engineers in Mexico, for example, don't commonly create long, detailed resumes and they prefer take-home exercises versus synchronous whiteboarding. Taking time to learn about interviewing practices in each region will also help you overcome subconscious bias from entering during the process.

Do take time to gauge non-technical skill sets: Autonomy, proactivity, collaboration, strong-written and verbal communication – these are just a few of the things that can make or break a remote employee. Be sure to screen for these using some of our included questions.

THE DEFINITIVE LIST OF QUESTIONS FOR REMOTE ENGINEERS

From Kerri Mckinney, Director of Global Sourcing, Terminal

One of the fastest ways to uncover non-technical skills is through strategically tailored interviews that are relevant to the unique demands of remote work.

Here are five skills to look for that our global sourcing team seeks in stellar remote candidates – and the right questions to ask:



Autonomy:

This skill is critical in remote work, from the ability to navigate a complex project without significant oversight to proactively overcoming roadblocks.

What to ask:

- Can you share some specific examples of how you have thrived autonomously on past projects?
- How have you been creative in independently advancing your work without your manager's close supervision?
- Tell me about a time you had to define and lead a project with minimal direction.

Resourcefulness:

Being resourceful means creatively and proactively seeking the right resources and support needed for any presented situation.

What to ask:

- Tell me about a time when you had to overcome a project obstacle on your own.
- Can you walk me through the steps and thought process you used to come to a solution?
- What is an example of a time when you found a non-obvious solution to a problem at work on your own?

Proactive collaboration:

With so many moving pieces, proactive collaboration among team members is essential.

What to ask:

- Tell me about a successful team collaboration at your last job, and how you specifically contributed to the process.
- How do you define your collaboration style as a team member?
- What are your favorite ways to foster remote collaboration with fellow team members when working asynchronously on a project?

Strong verbal + written communication:

Responsiveness and the ability to explain questions and concerns with clarity make communication essential for remote team success.

What to ask:

- Can you share an example of when clear communication made a project flourish?
- How about a time when communication hindered the success of an initiative?
- In retrospect, how would you go about this differently today to achieve a better outcome?

Self-motivation:

A self-motivated team member will often show signs of having a natural curiosity and love of problem-solving.

What to ask:

- What is the last thing you learned? Why did you pick this, and how did you go about learning it?
- How do you keep yourself ahead of the game? How do you stay informed on latest trends?
- Can you share an example of when you had to self-motivate through a long and challenging project?
- In the past, how have you remained motivated on a difficult project with minimal oversight?
- During your career, what was the last project you worked on where you spearheaded the initiative without previously being asked to?

You have the power and opportunity to rethink the developer interview – and it can set your organization apart. You can solve these pain points so that developers and startups aren't stuck in a frustrating cycle, and can focus on what matters most: building great products.

>two

Start things off right with outstanding onboarding

Onboarding can make or break the employee experience at any company, remote or not. Terminal's members span three countries and four time zones, and we've learned that a great start through onboarding provides a sense of community that leads to long-term job satisfaction. Industry data supports this – with studies showing that organizations with a strong onboarding process **improve new hire retention by 82% and productivity by over 70%.**

Most importantly, don't just rely on HR to run an onboarding system for the whole organization. Spend some time building out an intentional program for your team of engineers.

Here are three goals that drive our framework to spur your thinking:

Set each new employee up for success

- **Reach out early.** Onboarding begins in the weeks before an employee's first day. Send them a description of their role, an outline of their onboarding, and any other relevant information. Give new hires milestones to hit to help them advance quickly.
- **Set clear expectations.** Be sure to outline how you expect them to approach work as a remote employee. Do you expect them to maintain a set schedule and be online during certain hours of the day? Or is quality of work more important than time logged? Whatever it is, be sure to relay that information to help new hires succeed.
- **Provide abundant resources.** Give each new employee an in-depth overview of any virtual community benefits that you offer. Everything from employee resource groups to learning and development offerings to social networking opportunities should be outlined so employees can feel equipped to dive in.
- **Assess their workspace.** Some of your employees will be new to remote work. At Terminal we provide an evaluation to new remote employees of their at-home workspace to see how it could be better optimized for productivity.

Create a standardized global experience while maintaining team autonomy

- **Develop a handbook.** Documentation is crucial for remote work. Start a handbook that documents everything about what it's like to work at your company. The more detailed and prescriptive it is, the better. Revisit it often and empower employees to add to it.
- **Assign roles for your onboarding team.** When a team has a new employee joining, make sure that every team member knows what's expected of them for getting the new hire up to speed. Who can they go to with questions for each area of need? Who can be a buddy on the team for overall support? What's the manager's availability? Ensure that expectations are being shared and that team structure is clearly laid out.
- **Create a system for feedback.** With remote work, it's important that every process lives, breathes, and evolves on a daily basis. Onboarding is no different. Once new employees have completed their onboarding, you should give them an opportunity to provide feedback to help you improve your onboarding program. Many companies do this by sending new hires a simple survey about their onboarding experience.

Foster immediate connection to mission and community

- **Develop a buddy system.** Eighty-seven percent of companies that assign a mentor or a buddy during the onboarding process say that it's an effective way to speed up new hire proficiency. It's a great way to form early social bonds and gives your new hires someone they can turn to if they have questions. At Terminal, in addition to assigning a buddy, we hold a virtual global onboarding presentation where all new hires have the opportunity to meet each other and feel that they are part of a global community.



Expert Advice on introverts vs. extroverts

From Terminal's Chief People Officer Jennifer Farris

Extroverts usually thrive in a traditional office environment. They can engage people directly and energize themselves through social interactions. Introverts, on the other hand, are likely to be more reserved and less comfortable in traditional open offices. It can take awhile for them to come out of their shells. But in a fully remote office environment, we often will see the inverse. Introverts will blossom finding ways to connect that feel more controlled and thus more natural to them, while extroverts may struggle with feelings of isolation. As a manager you need to learn how each person generates their energy and encourage your team to understand everyone's personal needs. Doing so will increase engagement, productivity and overall wellness.

- **Personalize the experience.** When it comes to remote onboarding and remote work in general, it's critical for managers to know each individual's personality. This can go a long way to ensuring that employees find their place in the company and carve out a role that's meaningful to them.
- **Make hiring managers accessible.** 72% of employees say one-on-one time with their direct manager is the most important part of any onboarding process. Make sure that hiring managers block off time on a new employee's first day to welcome them, and schedule regular check-ins between managers and employees.

>three

Set clear goals and expectations (and hold people accountable).

Trust is a talked-about topic in remote work. Lack of visibility into the day-to-day efforts of remote team members can invoke fear in managers – even though the data tells us productivity for remote work is usually **much higher** (in fact, burnout can be the bigger risk).

The good news is that trust can be created and maintained by knowing your team is meeting their goal – and then creating mechanisms to track progress and hold your team accountable.



Goal-setting tip: Gather input

As you begin the process of creating goals, be sure not to do it in a silo. Remote employees often feel like goals and projects are thrust upon them, furthering that visibility and trust gap. Meet with your team for a quarterly goal-planning exercise and really listen to what they see as important projects as well as what's achievable for them each quarter.

Drive accountability

You can set goals all day – but unless you've built mechanisms to help the team get work done and be accountable for those goals, it's possible some team members may fall short.

Create focus time. Communication can be a huge time suck for remote teams – be sure that managers are giving team members time to get work done. At Pathlight, they set aside two, three-hour focus blocks a week. During this time the team turns off Slack, email, and other distractions. Before it begins, each person shares what they plan to work on, helping everyone stay accountable.

Report on progress: Build mechanisms where team members report on the progress of their goals each week, whether that's an asynchronous update in a document or a round-robin during the weekly team meeting.

Use 1:1s effectively. Instead of going over status updates, which could be done offline, use your 1-on-1s to coach and develop your report, resolve problems or blockers to their work and help them advance professionally. Encourage your direct reports to create an agenda for their 1-on-1s so they take charge of their own performance.

Four tips for effective goal-setting + measurement from Pathlight



Pathlight, Terminal partner and a source-of-truth platform for managing day-to-day team performance, shared with us some of their recommended approaches:

- 1 Set goals and KPIs at both the organization and individual level:** Each team member should understand the broader company priorities and how their individual and team OKRs directly advance those company priorities. As a manager, it's your job to help them see how their contributions relate to the broader strategic goals.
- 2 Set achievable milestones:** It's helpful to break big projects into smaller milestones. Support and encourage team members when they hit those milestones so they feel like they are making progress. At Pathlight, we call them mini-goals. And our software helps track performance against those mini-goals, alerting both frontline managers and their leaders when the goal is close to being achieved or about to be missed.
- 3 Communicate goals frequently:** Come up with something simple and catchy to communicate your goals. At Pathlight, for one quarter, the goals structure was *HAMS: Hiring, Announcement, Make Money, Ship*. It helps to start each team meeting with a quick recap of your quarterly priorities so everyone knows how they contribute to those top priorities.
- 4 Measure progress:** There are plenty of tools for measuring and managing OKRs, such as Lattice or 15 Five. But what's critical is to embrace platforms that not only help you set your OKRs but also measure the KPIs that help you achieve your OKRs. Whether it's "X commits a day" or "X% of releases that are bug-free," codify these KPIs, track and measure them in real-time.

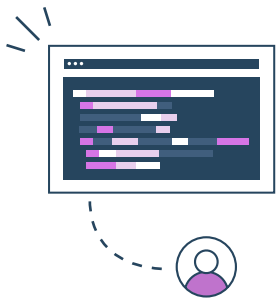
About Pathlight

Pathlight is a command center to manage, measure, coach and lead teams like a pro. [Learn more](#)

> four

Nail your workflows for huge boosts in productivity.

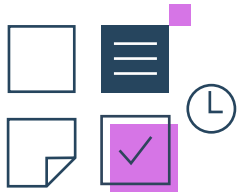
Without the ease of in-person conversations, it's common for “*information flow*” to become a major challenge for your team. The last thing you want is to endlessly ping your team for updates, it's tedious for everyone. Luckily, putting strong workflows in place – for updates, project management, code review, and any other consistent task your team does – will not only build your trust in them but will likely increase productivity of the team overall.



Master remote code review

Code review can become a bottleneck if it takes too long to complete, but doing reviews across time zones doesn't have to slow you down if you're **intentional about the process.**

- **Write fewer comments**, but make them more detailed. It slows down code review considerably when every comment requires a response (or two, or three). But in a remote work environment where you can't walk through the code in real-time, one quick comment can easily turn into a long thread spread out over several days. Instead, take the time to give information thoughtfully. Code owners should provide substantial background on the pull request, and reviewers should ask detailed questions to encourage thorough response and deep thinking.
- **Use the pull request as a communication channel.** It might make sense to hold asynchronous conversations around code in a tool like Github (as opposed to over a messenger or through a tool like Slack) if that's where your engineering team does most of its work.
- **Schedule time to sync up.** Introducing new stakeholders can draw out the review process by several days as code owners wait for new reviewers to come online and leave feedback. Consider scheduling a synchronous meeting two or three times a week to batch pull requests and run through all the feedback at once.

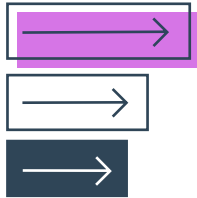


Make Agile development work for remote teams

Agile is all about quick execution, quick releases and short feedback loops, and what you do daily will define what you deliver. Sprints should be planned in advance and then setting a daily or weekly schedule for progress check-ins can keep your team accountable to the work they've been assigned. Develop habits around short cycles, with mini-deliverables and daily goals.

Your remote team might have to work on communication hurdles to keep things running smoothly, but by building clear steps toward milestones and using project management tools like Jira and Confluence, Agile processes can keep things moving forward.

Don't forget the power of reflecting on how your team works after the project is released – tools like Retrium and Scatterspoke offer great platforms for retrospectives.



Keep process simple

Remote teams can sometimes default to sticking to the established routine because changing it requires additional communication. Check in often to improve your team's approach and ensure that it's working, versus just carrying on "*business as normal.*"

Document everything

It's impossible to over communicate in a remote team. One good habit is to document within code and generate the documentation at build time – this way you won't have to manage different sets of code documentation.

Consider also having one documentation source for company information. Gitlab, for example, has a comprehensive remote handbook which documents everything from which individuals to contact for software access to when recurring engineering meetings take place. Dozens of merge requests are approved from employees by managers multiple times a day.



>five

Empower your Engineering Managers.

Managers are on the front lines of driving productivity and job satisfaction among your team. This means that the success of your remote team may depend largely on the guidance they are getting from their direct supervisors. Are you putting serious thought and energy into empowering their success? If not, it's time to take action. Here's how.

Build consistent 1:1 structure

The 1:1 meeting can vary between casual conversation, status update, or rigid check-ins on progress. Help your managers structure their 1:1s in a meaningful way. More than a status update, it's an opportunity for the remote employee to be heard: Have them add agenda items to the meeting and check in personally – how they are doing, and are they experiencing any silos or challenges as a result of their location?

Institute 360-feedback reviews

Build feedback from managers, peers and reports into your annual (or even better, semi-annual) review process. Feedback from remote employees on their managers can be awkward, but the “safe space” can also reveal glaring issues you weren't aware of, so you can fix them.

THE SIX C'S OF EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT

Jennifer Farris, Terminal's Chief People Officer, recommends the six C's framework to instill great management practices:

Clear purpose: Does everyone understand the Vision for the company and “why” the work they are doing is important? This is a hugely motivating factor for many people, and if you're seeing a lack of focus or drive, it may be that they feel disconnected from the overall purpose.

Cascading goals: What are we doing this month/quarter/year and how does it align with the purpose of the company overall?

Clarity of role: Does everyone know their roles and expectations?

Continuous feedback: Have you created mechanisms to give and receive feedback?

Coaching: Do you have effective one-to-one communication and recognition with your team?

Career journey: Does each person on your team have career goals they are personally motivated by that you check in on and actively support?

Give them a travel budget

As the team leader, it's likely you have money set aside to visit your remote teams on a regular basis. Give the same opportunity to your managers – after all, it's most important they foster a tight relationship with the on-the-ground team.

Make yourself available

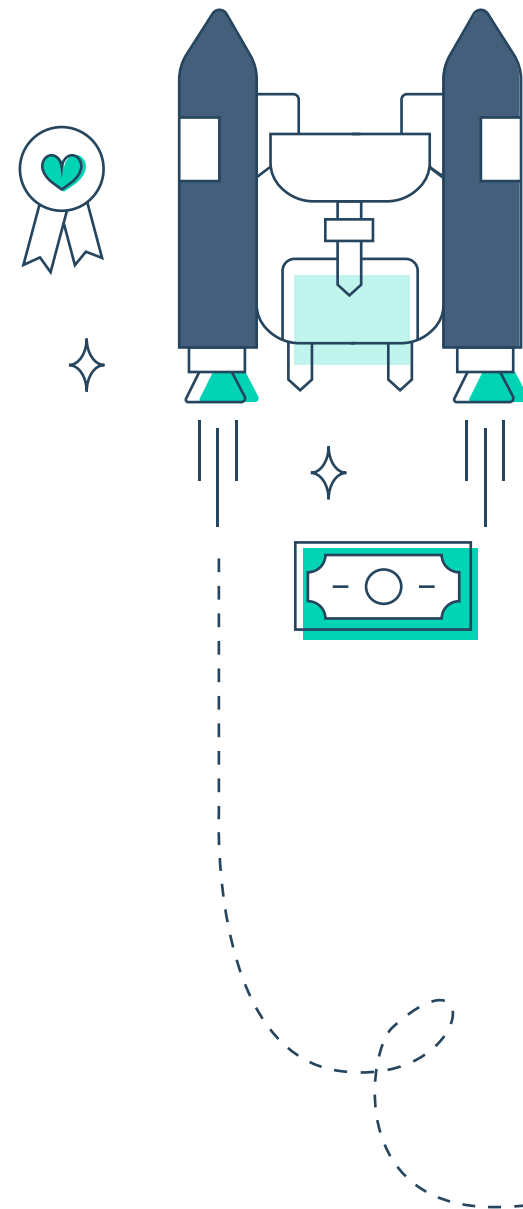
As team lead, you do not have daily interaction with each engineer. But, it can be highly motivating for everyone to feel you know them and understand their work. Run monthly office hours where people can pop in or select 5-10 developers each month for a “coffee chat” where you can discuss work and get to know them personally.

Don't ignore the red flags

No one wants to deal with management issues, but the longer you let things go, the worse it may be. Look for red flags, such as workers not hitting goals, disconnects between HQ and remote teams or lots of complaining from managers about their reports. By getting involved (and offering support) early, you may be able to quickly remedy the situation.

Hire remote engineering leads

Consider hiring a lead in each market where you have engineering teams – they can then be there on-site for both direction and camaraderie. For example, given their large team of engineers in Kitchener-Waterloo, Bluescape Software has engineering managers to help guide the team directly from the ground.



>six

Balance synchronous and asynchronous communication

The average user spends 90 minutes of **active time** on Slack per day. That's a lot of time spent in communication versus productive work.

Asynchronous communication seeks to solve for the time we spend in this distracted conversation. The term means communication that happens at different times, for example, if you send a message without expecting an immediate reply. It allows people to respond when it works for them, and it's a critical component of remote team communication.

While concurrent collaboration is ideal when it can happen, different time zones or working schedules may make this difficult. So, learning how to do async right – in a way that doesn't isolate but rather enhances productivity – is a top skill for engineering leaders.

Build intentionality around where and when for async

Twist, an internal communication tool, recommends a **few key use cases for async**, including company announcements, weekly/monthly updates, project planning, project discussions and general feedback.

Different channels may serve specific needs, and as a rule, it's best to keep async communication in transparent channels that anyone can see, versus private messages. Tools such as Tetra offer a knowledge base where people can track important information without having to ask repetitive questions (and potentially wait for response). Or, an internal wiki or blog can help to centralize larger organizational conversations. Zapier, for example, hosts an internal blog appropriately titled **Async** to gather feedback and share context to keep projects moving.

ASYNC TOOLS TO CONSIDER BASED ON PURPOSE

Slack, Basecamp, Twist
(Internal comms)

Google Docs (Spec, design)

Trello, Jira, Basecamp, Asana, Airtable
(Project management)

Tetra, Confluence, Notion
(Knowledge-sharing)

Github, Confluence, Coda, Slite
(Documentation & Code Review)

Git (Source code management)

Loom (Video updates)

Miro (Design)



How to do async right

Imagine how long it might take to accomplish something if you have to send a message, wait 8 hours to get a reply, and then send another for additional information. Sound painful? That's why there's a skill to async, and it starts with knowing how to frame an update or question so that it doesn't require a lot of back-and-forth to be productive.

Here are a few critical elements of an asynchronous question or update:

- **Context:** Messages should include a recap of the project or situation, along with any useful background on the situation. If sharing a status update, flag any blockers to moving forward.
- **Deadline:** Set a timeline for when you need to hear back. Project management tool **ToDoist** goes so far as to require 24-hour response time for all employees.
- **Action needed:** Be clear around what you are asking for, whether it's direction, feedback on a specific area or approval.



EXAMPLE OF GOOD ASYNC COMMUNICATION

Hi Jack - can you please provide me an update on Project Moonbeam? Specifically I'm looking for goals, timeline, key stakeholders, release date and which teams are responsible for each piece. I'm asking because I've recently been asked to support this project but I wasn't in the initial meetings. I'd like to get up to speed with as much documentation as I can before to help me figure out how I can best contribute. Please provide what you can by EOD Tuesday. Thanks so much!

Create ownership

Be sure there are decision-makers identified, whether that's an engineering manager or Scrum team lead, so that projects won't get stuck in limbo over ownership.

Balance async with human connection

Leaning too much toward written communication can isolate remote teams – it's important there's also opportunity for face time with teammates. Build in 1:1s, team offsites and team meetings to continue driving connection. Take time in meetings for personal banter. When updates are shared asynchronously, consider using tools that put the person in the center—such as video platform Loom.

It's in the balance between async and sync where you'll find productive, happy employees, it just might take time to fine-tune your channels and see what works best for your team.



EXAMPLE OF POOR ASYNC COMMUNICATION

Hey - I was just wondering, what's the status of Project Moonbeam? I am unclear on next steps. Let me know.

How VP of Engineering Russell Greenspan balances async and sync for his team

Russell Greenspan has built outstanding engineering teams at Tutor.com, [The Princeton Review](#), and, most recently, Terminal partner [PresenceLearning](#). When he joined Presence in 2019, he expanded the team's recruitment to Mexico to increase his talent pool and reduce labor costs, and the team now has home or office-based members in 8 locations.

Greenspan's goal is to create a "one-team culture" throughout the product and engineering organization. The key is well-defined communication structure.

"We do our daily standup via Slack, and use channels and threads to keep conversations organized," says Greenspan. "But it's important to watch for the moment when an async conversation has run its course and there isn't clear alignment, and to call a quick huddle."

In addition, regularly scheduled, recurring Zoom meetings help to discuss the finer details, catch any misunderstandings, and keep it interesting.



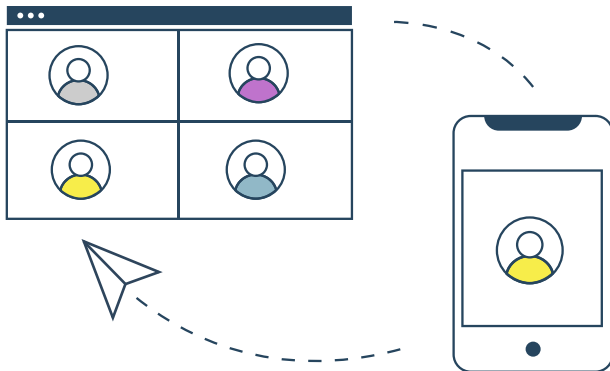
“ Everyone has at least a project team, guild team, and full team meeting each week. Keeping it varied and matrixed let's us consider a problem from a variety of vantage points and ensure everyone's on the same page. Take and publish notes, and try to avoid wasting anyone's time.

*Russell Greenspan—VP, Engineering
at PresenceLearning*

Hold remote meetings that bring people together (not set them apart)

Much has been written about the pain of meetings – **37% of employee time** is spent in meetings, according to one study, and **47% of employees** see meetings as time-wasters. Meeting efficiency and effectiveness is even more important for remote teams as often it's the only time they are getting face-time with the larger org.

While no one has yet managed to “fix” the corporate meeting, establishing a regular meeting schedule, with clear purpose and agenda, and building intentional engagement from remote teams can go a long way toward alleviating the pain and even boosting productivity.



Build a weekly meeting schedule

Start by setting a weekly and monthly cadence of meetings to create consistency in how your teams come together. Then, consider one-by-one where remote teams fit in.

Here's a good schedule to start:

- **Daily Standups.** Short, 15-minute virtual stand-ups bring engineers together so they can share what they're working on and discuss any blockers hindering development.

(See Range's tips below on how to optimize stand-ups for remote.)
- **Weekly 1:1s:** Between managers and reports, 1:1s should happen on a weekly basis, virtual or in-person, focusing on project reviews, coaching, and relationship-building.
- **Weekly scrum team meetings:** These meetings just include members of the immediate project team. When remote teams own an entire product or feature, Scrum meetings get a little easier as they can be done locally.
- **Bi-weekly sprint planning & retrospectives:** These project-focused discussions are essential to align everyone on their workload and velocity. Again, you may not need to bring remote teams in if the entire scrum team is co-located together.
- **Monthly engineering team meetings:** These large meetings will bring the entire team together to share scrum team updates, and get face-time with leadership. Remote teams can join via video but it's also imperative to record these meetings, and store them in the same destination, so everyone has access later.



Range on how to run an effective standup meeting with a remote team

Range knows a thing or two about driving effective meetings – it’s one of their product’s core capabilities. They shared with us what your team should cover during stand-up meetings and how to optimize them for remote.

What’s a standup?

In essence: short, daily status meetings. But why do you need those? Unfortunately, and commonly, only about 8% of leaders **are good at aligning strategy with execution**. This ends up creating an often-messy situation around priorities and what exactly everyone is, or should be, working on.

In order to get teams on the same page, various models have come into play, including the “standup meeting” and “the scrum meeting.” (These are usually synonymous terms; teams will often call their daily standup their “daily scrum.”) No matter the name, these meetings are intended to allow teammates to develop a shared understanding, coordinate efforts, and collaborate on problems.

In general, there are three cornerstone questions that make up a scrum meeting agenda: **What did you do yesterday? What will you do today? What blockers stand in your way?**

Standups were named that originally because everyone would literally “stand up” next to their desks for the meeting. However as more and more teams (and recently, many more) are remote, Range advocates for rethinking the standup.

A standup is a very transactional meeting, so it doesn’t need to happen synchronously in person. Instead, you can apply an approach that uses asynchronous communications. This is where Range comes in. Each person can quickly create a **Check-in** that covers what they’re doing and what they’ve done, and share it with the team. They also answer a team question, which helps foster team culture and connections.

And if you want to do a synchronous standup once or twice a week, Range has a meeting function to make them efficient and engaging. For synchronous meetings, keep in mind these best practices for **engaging remote employees** in the daily standup:

- **Be intentional about engaging the team:** Make sure everyone has a chance not just to report on the work, but report on themselves. Range has a spinner tool in their product that teams use at the beginning of meeting to check-in. It makes for a more inclusive and engaging experience.
- **Use tools to get people connected:** Remote meetings can get derailed quickly by a lack of focus and engagement, or be taken over by the people who talk the most. At Range, the tool allows teams to follow an on-screen meeting view, create shared agendas, record and assign action items on the spot, and share the meeting notes with everyone via email or Slack with no added effort.

- **Easy access:** There should be a calendar invite for the daily standup meeting and it should always have the conferencing link in it, so that anyone—especially remote workers and those traveling for work that week—can easily join.
- **Solid videoconferencing:** Make sure everyone can see and hear each other. One of the most frustrating things for people in daily standups is when a remote employee needs to talk to someone quickly (usually about blockers) and can't locate them in the room. "Is Jessica there? Jessica?" This can decrease the meeting's efficiency. Consider a budget to support the right tech for the team, from high-quality cameras to good lights and headsets.
- **Ask for feedback:** It's always important to ask for remote employee feedback on everything, so that they feel tethered to the bigger team. But ask them what is good, and not so good, about the daily standup meeting agenda. Start with how the technology designed to connect remote employees is working, then move to the agenda itself: Is it effective? Are we staying within time? Are people saying valuable things about how work is progressing?

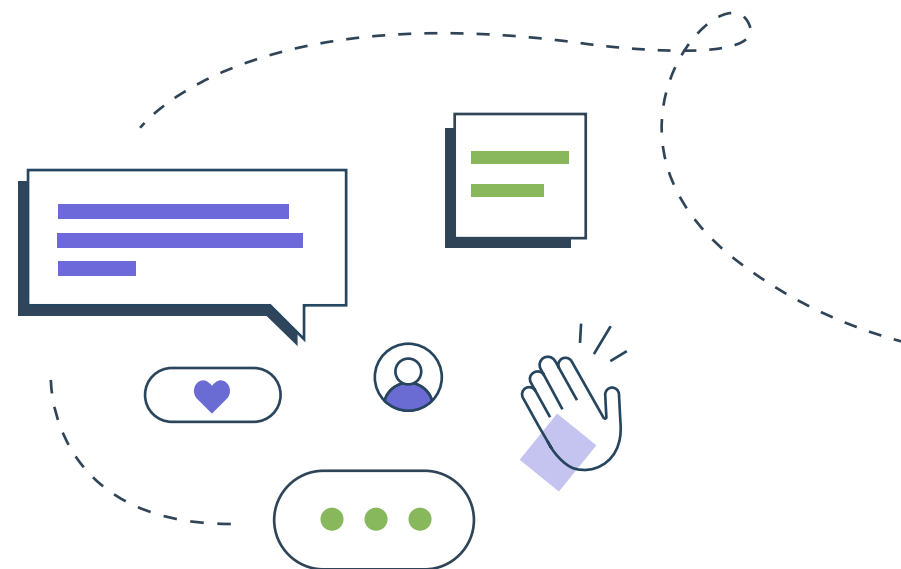
About Range

Range's software lets teams stay in sync and feel connected, even in today's increasingly distributed workplaces. It integrates with all your work tools so teams can get more done and stay focused.

[Learn More at Range.co.](https://range.co)

After you've built a consistent meeting schedule, make sure that all elements of your meetings transcend into the virtual space—here a few things to consider:

- **Start with icebreakers.** Icebreakers tear down personal-work barriers, allowing remote team members to share about themselves and get to know others. (Check out Miro's [12 great icebreaker questions.](#))
- **Always have an agenda.** Let employees know what the meeting will cover. [GitLab](#) recommends creating a simple agenda via Google docs and linking it in the invite.
- **Put faces forward.** Video conferencing should be top-notch – for small to midsize meetings, consider having everyone jump on their own Zoom, so that people can see each others' faces instead of just far-away figures in a conference room.



>eight

Create connection to overcome loneliness.

The quickest thing to go out the window with remote work is also the thing that makes us the happiest – human connection. Even for the most introverted, connection is a powerful force that motivates us and puts meaning behind the work we do.

In our recent **engineering survey**, 22 percent of engineers reported feelings of loneliness and isolation when working remotely. But, there is a path to maintain human connection through intentional actions that bring people together. Here are six tactics to explore:

- 1 Onboard remote employees in person, or promote travel between locations.** When safe to travel, we recommend you bring remote hires to HQ at the start of their employment for a minimum of 2 weeks to help build a strong relationship with the team. Leaders should then build travel to remote teams into their budget on a quarterly basis, spending time in social and productive connection.
- 2 Lean on video conferencing.** Technology can sometimes separate us, but video tools like Zoom or Google Hangouts allow for face-to-face connection among teams. Require that people turn their video on when joining calls and consider creating happy hours or coffee chats to bring “watercooler conversation” opportunities to remote teams.

- 3 Hold a virtual off-site for the entire team.** Sometimes as a remote employee you simply get left out of the mix when companies host fun get-togethers at headquarters. But, not all off-sites and social events have to be physical. At Terminal, our HR team hosts remote off-sites where all employees are at their computers – bringing together social and productive time that’s open to all.



Expert Advice – Don’t copy-and-paste “in-person” into “remote”

Darren Murph, Head of Remote at Gitlab, encourages team leaders to ask: “If you have an upcoming meeting...consider is that meeting necessary? Is there a different way to approach this now that we’re working from home? Could this be done asynchronously? Are there new ways or new tools we can look at that would make our life more efficient?”

4 Keep an eye on mental health. Remember the person behind the screen. If remote is new to your team, do more frequent quick check-ins to understand how employees are adjusting. They don't need to be structured – just reach out with a simple “How are you doing?” on Slack. As your remote teams grow, you may also want to look at benefits around mental wellness, such as Headspace memberships, that not only support your teams but also set your company apart when hiring.

5 Provide access to leadership (not just direct management). From blocking off office hours for remote teams to virtual Q&A sessions, company leaders need to be equally accessible for both internal and external employees.

6 Create a remote team champion. Gitlab was one of the first to hire a Head of Remote to champion all remote initiatives. Darren Murph says “It’s important to put the onus on someone driving this. This lies somewhere between HR and operations. As you enter a remote space you’ll have a lot of communication gaps that pop up.”



10 Slack channels that strengthen connection

From Distribute Consulting CEO Laurel Ferrer

How can you expect your remote team to talk to each other about budget cuts if they can't talk about puppies? Casual watercooler talk is a valuable element in co-located offices to help employees build relationships, get to know each other's communication styles, and connect around common interests. If an established friendship is in place, work conversations happen more easily, and processes run more smoothly. The same is true for remote teams, but because we're not bumping into each other in the break room, we need to intentionally design these spaces for casual conversations.

We're hearing from more and more distributed companies—including our own—that “Slack is our office.” Add one, two, or ten of the following breakroom channels to encourage small talk and improve culture on your team:



- 1. Celebrations** - From birthdays to baseball games, come here to share exciting news, brag about accomplishments, and show off. This space is high-five land, or if you're the bot type, Bonusly land.
- 2. Hobby Clubs** - Whether coding, climbing, gaming, or cooking is your thing, conversation is never lacking when discussing a shared passion.
- 3. Support Groups** - We could all use some encouragement during tough times (single parenting, addiction recovery, weight loss, etc.) from others who might know what we're going through.
- 4. Debate Team** - Sometimes it just feels good to get something off your chest or really dig into controversial topics. Provide a safe space for anyone to discuss and debate sensitive content, but be sure to set clear rules to ensure conversation stays healthy, proactive, and respectful.
- 5. Funny Forwards** - Throwing back to the days of the "Fw: Fw: Fw: Fw: Fw: Funny!" email subject lines, this channel is for those "too good not to share" memes, gifs, and stories. Also, it's a great place to take a break when you need a quick pick-me-up.
- 6. Inspirational Poster** - Need a little push to meet a tight deadline? Hop in here to look at a serene landscape photo or read an motivational story that will recharge you for your final stretch. Bonus: integrate humblebot for a daily reminder on how to be a wonderful human being.
- 7. Welcome, Newbies!** - A crucial part of remote onboarding, this space gives new team members access to important docs, answers to FAQs, and a place to ask questions as they get to know the company and settle into their role. You can even integrate the donut.ai slackbot to randomly pair up team members to work through blocks and questions together. (Tip: Make sure to pin the company handbook so that it's always easily accessible.)
- 8. Agile Reports** - Consider supplementing standup meetings by collecting asynchronous information before team get-togethers. For example, use a geekbot integration on Slack that prompts each team member to answer questions or provide a status update. Collecting info beforehand can make the meeting flow more efficiently and focused on the elements most in need of discussion.
- 9. Shark Tank** - No matter what role a team member has, he or she will inevitably have ideas for improving the company. Don't let those suggestions go to waste! Encourage these concepts to be shared and evaluated here. Then, at the end of the month or quarter, take a poll on the most promising concept. Invite the proposer to spearhead the project and see where it takes them...and the company!
- 10. Random** - Have something to share that doesn't fit into any category? Or maybe you just aren't digging the other nine channel ideas, but feel obligated to provide something unrelated to work? Random is for you.

About Distribute Consulting

Distribute Consulting offers consulting services to ensure that your organization will be reaping the rewards of workplace flexibility, not the risk. [Learn More](#)

>nine

Take learning + development across borders.

Chances are, you provide some form of education to your HQ employees – whether that’s the occasional expert speaker or hosting local meet-up groups. Remote teams have the same right to professional growth. In fact, in our [Engineer 2020 report](#), learning & development was one of the top 5 criteria engineers look for in a job opportunity.

Here’s what both managers and organizations can implement to ensure professional growth makes its way across the border, and helps differentiate your organization for prospects.

For managers:

- Hold regular career development conversations at least 2-4 times a year – your reports must know that their success and growth are top of mind for you.
- Create individual development plans, stating employees’ learning goals and concrete actions to reach them. Align on support they will need to achieve them (coaching, resources, time, etc.) Be sure to ask your employees about their learning style and preferences, and keep this in mind as you consider how to help them grow.
- Look for common themes or skills that need to be developed in your team and build learning circles or communities of practice around these.
- Genuinely care about their progress – as your employees start to learn a new skill or competency, do regular check ins to see how they are progressing, ask them what they have learned, and how they are applying the learning back to their job.

A LOOK AT TERMINAL'S L&D OFFERINGS

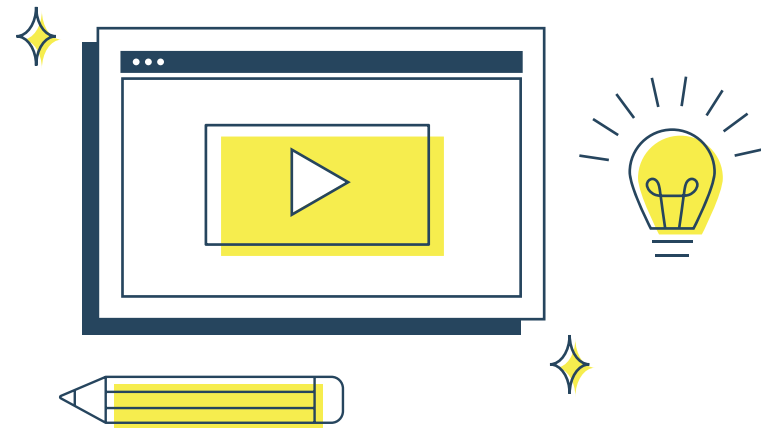
Supporting our members in their professional growth is something we take seriously. Here’s just a few elements of our 2020 program to inspire your thinking:

- [Tech Talks](#) featuring world-renowned tech leaders sharing insights on topics in the engineering world
- Hackathons to strengthen our engineering community and provide an opportunity for people to collaborate with other parts of the organization
- Themed webinars and other virtual educational offerings
- Funded employee resource groups, allowing people that share a common passion to meet and learn from one another
- Peer-curated learning resources

For organizations / teams:

- Take the time to carefully assess your organization and teams' learning needs. If they cannot be fulfilled with free resources, consider developing them in-house with your subject matter experts if time permits, or offering a free subscription to online learning content providers that may specialize in the areas that would be most beneficial.
- Bring in-person workshops online. That could mean a live, high-quality videofeed for talks held at your office, or exploring some of the exciting technologies for experiential learning, such as gamification and VR/AR.
- Offer a company subscription for online resources, or share a document pulling together all of the resources online that are free and can serve basic learning needs.
- Consider organizing stretch assignments and special projects where people can learn or practice new skills. As a good rule of thumb, consider allowing 10% of employee's time to be spent learning and preparing for the future.

At the end of the day, it's hard to meet everyone's needs with one-size-fits-all solutions. Consider letting your employees decide where they want to invest by giving them (or management) their own L&D budgets. The most important thing is that people feel supported in their efforts to grow professionally – so be clear and upfront about what you're doing to help.



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Create an engineering culture (and embed it across offices)

Culture is not a top-down set of initiatives created by management – it’s owned by everyone at an organization. But certainly executive team leaders have a lot of stake in setting up the workflows and mechanisms that create and translate culture across the organization.

For managers:

Define values for your engineering team

Likely, your company already has a set of values that drive your culture. At Terminal, a few of ours are “Global citizen and Local champion” “Agents of growth” and “Own it.” But, does your engineering team have its own set of values? A shared set of ideals and characteristics is proven to bring teams together. And, just the act of creating them can be a highly rewarding process for the team to be able to contribute and shape the values that define them.



How Asana defined their engineering values

The team at Asana asked themselves three key questions:

- How do we excel as engineers?
- Where should we focus our feedback to each other on how to improve?
- What are we looking for when we evaluate engineering candidates?

This led them to create the following set of values:

- Learn with curiosity
- Strive with simplicity
- Articulate your mental model
- Ship fast, sustainably
- Fix problems, even when they’re not yours
- Teach with compassion

See more about their journey, and read their team members’ perspectives on each value in their inspiring [blog post](#).



Translate values into experience

Once you have a set of values in place, give thought to how these translate into your internal communication, programs, team building activities, policies, onboarding and more.

At Asana, for example, one of their engineering team values is “Ship fast, sustainably.” They make huge investments that allow for continuous deployment with multiple pushes per day and offer teams no-meeting Wednesday to get work done.

At Terminal, we designate a values champion each month who exemplifies the best of our business – this helps encourage everyone to live the values while putting real-world examples to the model.

Three tips make your culture translate into a remote environment

- **Hire for it:** Sometimes screening for culture goes by the wayside with remote employees – but the best way to build the culture you want is to make sure your remote hires are also screened for culture. They should be simply an off-shoot of your HQ team.
- **Build workflows:** Distribute Consulting **recommends** developing workflows to inject the culture directly into a regular process. For example, if your culture revolves around an active lifestyle, start your weekly standup call with a jumping jack challenge.
- **Create digital pathways:** Create channels where you can celebrate big wins, share announcements or just have watercooler conversation across the company.

Expert Insight on developing a listening strategy

from Terminal's Chief People Officer Jennifer Farris

Listening is the first step to understanding whether your companies' culture is strong or struggling. Annual or semi-annual surveys won't solve for the regular drumbeat of health checks that need to be done. Create regular, lightweight pulses to connect with remote teams at headquarters and beyond. You'll know there's an issue if you're getting feedback of isolation, frustration or self-preservationism. Make sure to take action on what you hear, so that the company knows their input results in a better workplace for all.

Whew. Alright, we know that was a lot of information. We hope you're able to come back over time to discover insights as you need them to build and manage your team.

TL;DR

Remote teams can have significant productivity and happiness gains – building the right remote thinking now will help you adjust quickly for the rapid shift toward remote we're all experiencing.

But it's not as easy as hiring a remote employee and giving them a laptop. Putting strategy and intention behind your team structure, market selection and management is the difference between a group of engineers building code and a product-building powerhouse that will drive your growth.

And lastly, we'd love to have you join our community of engineering leaders over at terminal.io – we're always sharing content, education, events and other opportunities for you to grow your remote management skills.